



The Honorable Ben Ray Lujan

Question: I represent a state with real needs when it comes to broadband deployment. While I absolutely support efforts aimed at breaking down barriers slowing deployment, we also must commit to making the necessary investments. Through the Connect America Fund, the FCC incentivized carriers like CenturyLink to build to high-cost areas by offering them additional support. CenturyLink took the FCC up on its offer in 33 states.

Currently, the FCC is working to reform the universal service mechanism that supports rate-of-return carriers' deployment and maintenance of broadband services. As part of that effort, I support including a Tribal Broadband Factor that could drive millions of dollars in investments to some of our most vulnerable communities.

Mr. Bergmann, what are the primary challenges to ensuring populations in difficult to serve regions are able to access affordable broadband? What can we do to make these areas more viable for carriers?

Answer:

CTIA believes that mobile wireless broadband can and should play a crucial role in meeting consumer needs and demand in rural areas. While my testimony highlighted the general barriers we face in deploying wireless infrastructure, the basic economics of deploying mobile wireless broadband to unserved, remote areas are challenging. With consumers' strong preference for mobile wireless services, CTIA believes that wireless facility siting policies are critical to deployment in these areas. It is also essential that federal universal service programs adhere to competitive and technology neutral policies.

Consumers increasingly are adopting wireless to access essential communications services and information resources. As of December 2014, there were approximately 355.4 million wireless connections nationwide, equal to 110 percent of the U.S. population. The percentage of households that are wireless-only has been steadily increasing, and many American adults now exclusively have access to telephone service via wireless devices. What's more, some 19 percent of American adults rely primarily or solely on their mobile devices for online access.

As I said in my testimony, building out wireless infrastructure to ensure that all Americans have broadband capabilities will require access to locations controlled by the Federal



government and others. Access to federal properties is especially important in rural, hard-to-serve areas where federal agencies, including the Bureau of Land Management, National Park Service and U.S. Forest Service, control substantial geographic areas of the country. Clear and complete implementation of Section 6409 of the 2012 Spectrum Act, the 2012 Executive Order and the recommendations of the Broadband Opportunity Council can help advance wireless broadband siting by establishing common processes and contracts for the deployment of wireless facilities on federal property.

In addition, to ensure our rural areas are part of the mobile wireless future, the FCC's universal service policies should reflect consumer demand for mobile wireless broadband services. Specifically, we believe the FCC's Connect America Fund should be competitively and technologically neutral to direct limited federal USF resources to the most efficient and effective solution for an unserved rural area. As the FCC acknowledged in the *National Broadband Plan* and the *USF/ICC Transformation Order*, the most efficient technology to serve a particular area will vary based on a number of factors including the locations of customers, proximity to other facilities, and topography. For many areas, mobile wireless services will be the most efficient technology. Use of the most efficient technology will ensure that more Americans receive broadband service at a lower cost to the federal universal service fund.

CTIA also believes the FCC should fulfill a commitment made in the 2011 *USF/ICC Transformation Order* to establish a permanent Mobility Fund. A permanent Mobility Fund will further enable wireless providers to deploy the mobile wireless broadband services that will meet the educational, commercial and communications needs of rural consumers.